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Whose Commons are Mobilities Spaces? – The Case of Copenhagen’s Cyclists

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Abstract

The question of how to get more people to cycle has spread to many cities around the world. Copenhagen is often identified as having achieved considerable success in this regard, but there is a danger that the positive cycling narrative that prevails in Copenhagen may block critical discussion regarding the right to city space. Drawing from qualitative research conducted in Copenhagen as part of an “Urban Cycle Mobilities” project, this article demonstrates that people who cycle in Copenhagen constitute a community of cyclists, and asks whether such a cycling community creates the condition for cyclists and cycling to be given greater consideration in broader societal understandings of the common good. I argue that this is in fact not the case. Rather the specific project identities that are nurtured by Copenhagen’s cycling community inhibit it from advocating publicly or aggressively for a vision of the common good that gives cyclists greater and more protected access to the city’s mobility spaces.

Introduction: Copenhagenizing

Copenhagen has long been recognized as one of world’s major cycling cities, with a strong cycling culture, and many people using bicycles to move about. The term “Copenhagenize” is often used to describe a set of planning and design strategies loosely based on those used in Copenhagen, aimed at nurturing urban



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cycling. Danish architect Jan Gehl is often credited internationally (although not in Denmark) as the father of this planning strategy, which he has exported to several major world cities, most famously New York. Filmmaker and photographer Michael Colville Andersen has also played an important part in the “Copenhagenize” narrative. As an international consultant, Anderson travels the world talking and writing about Copenhagen’s cycle culture, and in 2007 he launched the website www.copenhagenize.com. Between them, Gehl and Anderson have successfully propagated the idea that Copenhagen is a model cycling city, whose approach should be duplicated throughout the world. It is therefore difficult to criticize any aspect of Copenhagen’s cycling culture or attitude toward cycling; nevertheless, this article focuses on some problematic aspects of Copenhagen’s somewhat self-satisfied cycling narrative.

Getting more people to cycle is a major goal of Copenhagen’s municipal government. Today 35% of Copenhageners use bikes for everyday commuting; the municipality aims to increase that to 50% by 2020 (Copenhagen Municipality, 2011). That’s a lot, especially as the latest numbers show that cycling in the city is declining slightly (Copenhagen Municipality, 2012). Moreover, car traffic continues to rise in Copenhagen, with the result that streets are becoming more congested. Clearly, this increase in car traffic is not compatible with the aim to increase cycling as a way to get around. It seems that no matter how much Copenhagen wishes to be seen as a cyclist-friendly city, putting limits on car traffic is still politically unfeasible. The city government recently announced that it would no longer pursue a policy of “congestion charging”, even though such a policy had been a highly-profiled election promise. The media discussion that followed this announcement was emotional and unpleasant, and often focused on the aggression of “other” road users, cyclists in particular. Although it is true that Copenhagen has many cyclists, it faces the same challenge as other cities: changing the majority of people’s mobility praxis and sorting out what modes of transportation should have the right to road space.

One of the ways Copenhagen attempts to shift residents’ mobility praxis toward cycling is by seeking to create ‘community feeling’ among cyclists via cycling campaigns and the construction of cycling infrastructure. The national government dedicates funding to these cycling-promotion strategies throughout Denmark, including “community building” projects in Copenhagen. One of these projects is the Bicycle Innovation Lab (BIL), which aims to provide a forum for introducing everyday cycling issues into political discourse. BIL also operates a bicycle library intended to get more people using bikes.

It is in this context of deliberate attempts to create cycling communities and ongoing tension regarding the rights of cyclists relative to motorists that I develop the article’s main case: that people who cycle in Copenhagen constitute a community of cyclists, but that the existence of such a community fails to create conditions for cyclists and cycling to be given greater public consideration in broader understandings of the common good. My argument unfolds as follows. In

the remainder of this introductory section I situate the article in my larger ongoing research project, and outline my methodology and the interview data it yielded. The paper's second section introduces readers to the infrastructural and policy context within which cycling occurs in Copenhagen. After outlining the paper's empirical context, I then develop a more theoretical discussion of community and its relationship to mobility. It is often claimed that mobilities contribute to the erosion of contemporary communities (Bauman, 2001; Putnam, 2000). I argue that mobilities must also be understood as generative or constitutive of contemporary communities. In the fourth section I turn to my interviews with Copenhagen drivers and cyclists to demonstrate empirically the theoretical argument that cycling (as a form of mobility) creates and maintains communities. Specifically, I show that cyclists forge communities as they struggle with cars for space on the road, identify common enemies and friends through that struggle, or simply share emotions and embodied experiences with other cyclists as they glide through the city together. The paper's fifth section focuses in on Copenhagen's Bicycle Innovation Lab (BIL), the mandate of which is to promote cycling and the creation of cycling communities, while also advocating for cyclists' right to road space in terms of a larger "common good." In the sixth section I return to my interview data to tease out some of the complexities associated with representing cycling as a common good. I show that problems arise with the notion of cycling as a common good when participants (who are drivers as well as cyclists) are asked to consider the privileges automobile drivers would have to relinquish in order to achieve it. The article concludes by outlining some barriers to initiating more sustained discussions about a common good within and beyond the cycling community of Copenhagen. The paper's main contribution to existing understandings of Copenhagen as a model cycling city is to show that the project identities (Castells, 1997) associated with Copenhagen's cycling community themselves hinder ongoing efforts to enhance cyclists' rights to road space in the city.

The research presented here is part of an on-going research project titled 'Urban Cycle Mobilities,' funded by the Danish Council for Independent Research. The project is animated by the seemingly simple question of why people bike, and therefore focuses on issues of freedom, ethics and responsibilities, everyday rationalities and – as elaborated in this article – communities. Although Denmark has been the focus of much research on cycling infrastructure, design, safety and security (Andrade *et al.*, 2011; Snizek *et al.*, 2013), little attention has been given to the meaning and significance cyclists give to cycling as a form of everyday mobility: to why they bike. The Urban Cycle Mobilities project attempts to rectify this gap by focusing on everyday life praxis, the rationalities that support commitments to cycling, and the emotions associated with traveling by bike.

Although the larger project employs several ethnographic methods, the empirical data used in this article are based on 30 qualitative interviews, three focus groups, and case study focusing on the Bicycle Innovation Lab (BIL). At the time of interviewing participants were between the ages of 22 and 73, and include an

equal number of men and women. Interviews were conducted in 2007, 2010 and 2013. All the participants use a variety of transport modes, but the 2007 interviews focused mainly on car drivers, while in 2010 and 2013 participants were mostly cyclists. Approximately half of the interviewees have children, they all identify as middle class, and they are all well-educated. Denmark's population has a high Gini coefficient and a large middle class, so my participants share important economic and demographic characteristics with a majority of Danes (Freudenthal-Pedersen, 2014c). The focus of the interviews was how participants understand and create communities through everyday mobilities, as well as their cycling-related emotional and sensory experiences (Sheller, 2004).

The Empirical Setting – Copenhagen and its cyclists

Copenhagen is Denmark's capital and its largest city. The city itself has a population of half a million; 1.2 million people reside in Greater Copenhagen. The city has an extensive network of public transportation, structured around the so-called 'finger plan', which in 1947 divided the suburbs into five fingers defined subsequently by the S-train lines and highways (Gaardmand, 1993). Similar to many other European cities, private cars account for approximately a third of all trips made in Copenhagen. Unlike most European cities, a majority (84%) of Copenhageners have access to a bike, and 36% use them for everyday commutes (Københavns Kommune, 2010).

Copenhagen's first dedicated cycle track was built in the late 19th century as a way to deal with conflicts between cyclists and horse-drawn carriages. Cycling has been part of Copenhagen's planning agenda since then, even throughout the 1960s and 1970s when urban transport planning in Copenhagen and worldwide was strongly focused on car traffic (Koglin, 2013). Cycling has been a growing municipal focus since the 1980s, understood by city government as part of urban development (Jensen, 2013). This contrasts with most other European cities, where cycling is neither included in notions of urban traffic, nor understood as the state's responsibility to nurture. For example, Aldred (2013) notes that in England cycling is strongly perceived to be a matter of individual choice and individual responsibility.

Copenhagen presently has an extensive network of cycle tracks; these constitute the backbone of the city's cycling infrastructure and help to ensure the accessibility and safety of cyclists (Snizek *et al.*, 2013). Dedicated traffic lights have been installed for cyclists, giving them a head start before motorized traffic, and on several big roads a green wave for cyclists has been established. Cycling is allowed against one-way traffic on inner city streets with a 30 km/h speed limit (and recently on some streets with a 50 km/h speed limit) in order to enable visual contact between car drivers and cyclists. The health and safety of cyclists is ingrained in traffic law, with the result that cycling is not considered a hazardous activity in Copenhagen (as it is in England; see Aldred, 2012; Spinney, 2010); it is

understood simply as key mode of transport for many households. As Jensen (2013, 304) puts it:

Copenhageners' use of bikes is not defined in terms of risk, but rather in terms of urban everyday life on the move, with the sensuous, kinetic, and emotional power of biking emerging as a key to urban spatiality and vitalism.

Copenhagen's everyday cyclists are neither visually identifiable (except by their bikes) nor associated with stereotyped images or visual signifiers like lycra and helmets (cf. Aldred, 2013).

The inclusion of cyclists in Copenhagen's traffic system, and their relative invisibility as a category distinguishable from other urban dwellers, helps explain the lack of a radical grassroots movement to politicize cycling or advocate for cyclists' rights. Copenhagen's most recent demonstration in support of better facilities for cyclists was in the 1970s (Koglin, 2013). Since that time the Danish Cyclist Federation has been the only stable long-term NGO working on cycling politics (Koglin, 2013), and cycling events. Apart from those organized by the municipality, cycling events focus mostly on bike design and cycling fashion, promoting cycling without treading on anyone's toes.

Cycling is deliberately exploited as an important part of Copenhagen's urban brand, even though the city spends ten times more of its budget on automobile infrastructure than on cycling infrastructure.² For example, in 2009, the municipal Department for Cycling attempted to quantify the health and socioeconomic benefits of cycling as part of the city's branding strategy. The municipality used models developed to demonstrate the economic growth benefits of roads to instead show why cycling is better for society and the national bottom line. The study concluded that when a person chooses to cycle, society has a net gain of 0.16 Euro per kilometre cycled compared to a net loss of 0.1 Euro per kilometre travelled by car (Københavns Kommune, 2010). Although the study's methodology may be vulnerable to criticism, it is noteworthy that the municipal government employed this guerrilla tactic of appropriating the powerful automobile lobby's seldom-questioned methods to argue that greater economic and health gains derive from money spent on cycling infrastructure than on roads (Koglin, 2013; Essebo, 2013).

This municipal investment in promoting the benefits of cycling is important to creating a cycling community in Copenhagen. So are other ways that the city signals its commitment to cycling relative to driving and other mobility modes, for example by prioritizing bike paths as "Level One" streets that – together with the

² This percentage was provided by the municipality's Department of Cycling with the caveat that it is difficult to calculate the precise amount devoted to cycling infrastructure, because some municipal projects have multiple aims including benefits to cyclists. The reorganisation of Nørrebrogade is an example (<http://www.copenhagenize.com/2013/08/episode-05-nrrebrogade-top-10-design.html>).

two major road arteries into Copenhagen – are the first to be cleared after a snowfall. Another important facilitator of community feeling among cyclists are bicycle counters, which are located on several big roads in Copenhagen, telling bike riders how many other cyclists have passed that day and year. In the words of one of my interview participants:

It always makes me happy when I meet one of the electrical cycle counters telling me that I am number 1324 passing by bike today. Then I can tell I am part of a bigger movement...The important thing is to make people feel that they are a part of a bigger project. It indicates that you are making a difference.

These are efforts by Copenhagen's municipality to nurture the sense of a community of cyclists, in order to support the city's objective to get more commuters cycling. These municipal initiatives are undoubtedly beneficial to Copenhageners, but they also help create an environment where criticizing any aspect of the city's cycling culture or policies is difficult. I shall return to this point in a later section.

Mobility and Community

There is a long scholarly tradition of understanding mobility as contributing to the erosion of community (e.g., Tönnies, 1957; Bauman, 2001). Tönnies' conceptualization of *gemeinschaft*, for example, imagines community as constituted through family life, village culture, religious practice and unquestioned tradition: the spontaneous, natural, face-to-face interactions of small sedentary populations, unaffected by mobility, or by interventions from city councils or planning authorities (Tönnies, 1957, 231). For Tönnies, a community doesn't think about how it is; it emerges organically from conditions of life and the sharing of responsibility among a closely-interacting group of people. According to Bauman (Bauman, 2001; Bauman in Thomsen, 2013) this view of community is obsolete and anachronistic:

Solidarity is in big trouble. In the old version of modern society solidarity was a big factor. The contemporary society is in its essence a factory of mutual suspicion and mutual competition. To create a community in this respect is very difficult (Bauman in Thomsen, 2013, 20).

Bauman (2001), Sennett (2003) and Putnam (2000) argue that in late modernity work and family life are under such pressure that civil society communities are eroding, individuals can no longer rely on the collective comforts of tradition, and individualism is on the rise (Bauman, 2000; Urry, 2007; Urry, 2000; Eriksen, 2001). According to Bauman, this individualism:

... occupied from the very start an ambiguous position towards society, one pregnant with never-subsiding tension. On the one hand, the individual was credited with a capacity for judgment, for recognizing interests and taking decisions on how to act upon them – all qualities which make living together in a society feasible. On the other hand, however, individuality was imbued with

intrinsic dangers: the very interestedness of the individual, which prompted him to seek collective guarantees for security, enticed him at the same time to resent constraints which such guarantees implied (Bauman, 1988, 38).

Bauman (2001, 39) argues that despite these ambiguities, communities continue to be necessary for humanity's existence and continuation, a dependency that has remained largely unchanged over the centuries. Even in today's world of extreme individualization, communities offer ontological security by generating feelings of acceptance and mutual assistance, and enabling sharing of everyday life experiences and responsibilities (Giddens, 1984; Beck, 1992), including those pertaining to childcare, marriage, working life, the environment, and mobility behavior.

In today's increasingly mobile world, community-forming practices of interaction and responsibility-sharing often rely less on spatial propinquity than in Tönnies' model (e.g., relationship courses, Facebook groups, diverse radio programs on childcare), even as neighbourhood-oriented interactions remain significant to individuals' understanding of the 'good life' (e.g., soccer clubs or dinner clubs, neighbours communing together via bikes, trains or cars). Heeding Urry's (2000; see also Kaufmann, 2002) admonition that late-modernity requires new theoretical categories, some scholars have attempted to describe these contemporary forms of patterned interaction in terms of "networks" (Larsen *et al.*, 2006) or "conviviality" (Thomsen, 2013). Although networks and conviviality are no doubt important aspects of contemporary forms of association, they fail adequately to articulate the extent to which the mobile routines of everyday life (associated with, for example, kids, home-making, friends, leisure activities) continue to generate the meaning-making and ontological security conventionally associated with notions of community. I think the small groups through which these routines are practiced are communities, which provide contemporary "frames" within which life experiences can be exchanged (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1997; Bauman, 2001), and according to which late-modern subjectivities are shaped (Giddens, 1991).

Many of late-modernity's small-group communities are liminal, in the sense that they occupy those mobility spaces – 'in between' spaces – that are becoming more important in people's lives (Urry, 2000, 141; see also Jensen, 2012). Kesselring and Vogel (2013, 20) argue that these spaces of movement are ordered through "mobility regimes"; that is, systems "of disciplining and channeling movements and mobility by way of principles, norms, and rules" (Kesselring and Vogl, 2013, 20), which shape behavior, conduct, and shared responsibility in a manner analogous to traditional communities. As the concept of mobility regimes suggests, and as demonstrated by work on individuals' "structural stories" of mobility (Freudendal-Pedersen, 2009), movement spaces entail more than just individualized plans and errands. Rather the groupings and practices that unfold in movement spaces are highly structured through moral and ethical arguments, and, to quote Staeheli and Mitchell's (2006, 148-149) broader discussion of

communities, often “involve attempts to exclude or marginalize people through regulation and actions that make certain people and behaviors unwelcome.”

As part of their discursive framing, communities associated with movement spaces and mobility regimes frequently draw on notions of the common good, which designate “a condition that not only continues to exist in the future, but also one whose results are appreciated retrospectively in a second future, thus from the perspective of descendants, as a valuable collective inheritance” (Offe, 2012, 677). Offe (2012) argues that common goods discourses are experiencing a renaissance, driven by the efforts of ruling elites to shift the burden of managing societal problems onto the shoulders of civic self-help and community spirit (Offe, 2012, 667-668). When the idea of the common good emerges amidst neoliberal discourses of individualized competition, it is used politically to place more responsibility on civil society, including that of squeezing out the ‘unwanted’.

Establishing an understanding of the common good that transcends communities to incorporate relations among communities (i.e., a commonly-accepted common good) is inevitably a conflict-ridden process, not least in the realm of urban mobilities. Danish politicians avoid such discussions, because they inevitably lead to questions of which transportation modes should lose privileges to achieve the common good, and that stirs up antagonism among different mobility communities. The majority of Danish society accepts “neotechnological automobilization” (Nixon, 2012) as the appropriate dominant response to energy use issues. As Nixon says, “transport decision makers predominantly drive” (2012, 1673), and “the neotechnological approach allows capture of the consumers’ surplus and is less likely to disrupt capital accumulation” (2012, 1664). In this context, the lock-in of the myth of “prosperity through mobility” (Essebo, 2013) can make greater automobility an obvious common good that is dangerous for Copenhagen’s politicians to contradict. Of course cyclists – as cyclists – do not agree (although they might agree as car drivers, which many of them also are). Therefore, despite increasing traffic congestion and associated problems, the Copenhagen Municipality recently increased the number of parking spaces in the inner city, while also setting major goals for future cycling. This patchwork approach to sidestepping antagonism among mobility communities may actually have the effect of fueling them. I turn now to my interviews with people who cycle in Copenhagen as a way to tease out some of these antagonisms between mobility communities, and to show how they facilitate community cohesiveness among individuals using the same mobility mode. I will return to the issue of cycling’s relation to the common good in subsequent sections.

Communities of biking

At end of 2012, the Danish media ran several articles about aggressive Copenhagen cyclists, which spawned additional articles about aggression within *all* modes of mobility. My interview participants recognized the situation described by the media; many of them suggested that antagonism between drivers and cyclists is

enacted everyday through often-escalating aggression in the context of competition between cars and cycles for limited movement space. Moreover, participants often recognized themselves as occasional aggressors in the fight for space on the roads:

There are many confrontations, that's for sure. You are constantly tested, you always have to throw out a feeler, who rides here and who does what. I have seen many people getting angry. Especially my wife has a bad temper, but it's not something that agitates me. It's part of the show.

It is clear that this fight for space on the road was understood by participants as at least partially a group fight, involving “them” and “us”. Social anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2004) describes communities as a reverse refrigerator: warm on the inside, cold on the outside. The warmth associated with a “we” may be based on a common language, living in the same place, having the same sex or family structure, or – in the present case – by sharing mobility experiences. Eriksen elaborates as follows:

If one, in addition, has a common project, a goal for the future, which is dependent on the other group member's effort to succeed, it helps tremendously. And if one furthermore can plead a common enemy, someone else who threatens to thwart the plans, then everything is laid out for a strong and solidarity ‘we-feeling’ which lasts as long as it is possible to put forward to the enemy ... (Eriksen, 2004, 63) [my translation]

Within the context of cyclists' everyday mobilities the car is a clearly-defined enemy, albeit a fluidly and ambiguously-experienced one, as many cyclists are also car drivers. For many of the mobile subjects in my interview sample mobility rights travel with the self: right of way belongs to one's present mode of transportation, whatever that may be (see Zeitler's (2008) discussion of “mobility and morality”). This ambiguity or fluidity is articulated well by one of my participants:

I actually really don't like these situations where conflict emerges between people. Both in-between cyclists but also between cyclists and car drivers, which do not show consideration to each other, it's like it's different groups. Although most of us are part of all these different groups, we're both car drivers, cyclists and pedestrians who are different characters. When I am on my bike, it is the bike considerations I make, and think I have the right to run a yellow light. It's like many others, I can fucking well get irritated in traffic, normally I have very little temper but I can get fucking irritated in traffic, like many others. It is bloody annoying.

The fact that most cyclists in Copenhagen are also drivers, combined with the ordinariness of cycling in Copenhagen (in contrast with the discourse of cycling as special and dangerous that prevails in other European and North American cities; see Spinney, 2009; Horton, 2007; Nixon, 2012; Aldred, 2013), helps to explain why

Copenhagen is one of the world's few cities where cycling has moved from a "resistance identity" to a "project identity", focused on building new institutions based on cyclists' own praxis (see Castells, 1997). The normalization of cycling reduces cyclist's inclination or obvious reason to resist, and the cultivation of project identities allows various interests effectively to manage power relations between cars and bikes without disrupting them.

This notion of a project identity is evident in the following quote, in which the participant acknowledges that cyclists have to depend on themselves to create their own spaces in a context where cycling had been normalized, but automobility still dominates materially and ideologically:

Before I started biking, cyclists did not really exist for me, if I may put it that way. They were just there, they have always been there, and they take care of themselves. I do not think car drivers, for example, think one bit about how much more uncomfortable a pothole is for a two-wheeler. I really don't think so, why should they, they don't experience it. I also think it's a little as if the car is the proper adult mode of transport people have because it is needed to solve real problems.

In the case of cyclists, project identity is both nurtured by and constitutive of a strong sense of a cycling community in opposition to a car-driving 'other', and the everyday aggressions associated with enacting project identity among cyclists are intrinsic to nourishing the necessary sense of we. But a sense of cycling community, and of the possibilities of its associated project identity, are also nourished by more positive – less antagonistic – feelings. Interview participants feel strongly that cycling is understood to be important in Copenhagen, and they talked at length about the positive emotions associated with travelling by bike amidst many other bikers in a city that values cycling:

The best thing about Copenhagen is that there are so many people who are used to cycling. It creates a special flow; sometimes it's almost poetic when everyone knows what to do and how to behave. When the flow gives a sense of a carefree life, for example when you see millions of cyclists waiting for the green light and then they start to move and it's the kind of movement where everyone knows what to do - it's beautiful.

This aesthetically-pleasing flow helps to create feelings of connectedness, especially as it is a "self-organized harmonization between commuters' rhythms and those of their commute landscape" (Nixon, 2012, 1667). The flow is dependent on an acknowledged shared responsibility to move in the right direction and make room for each other, a movement where 'everybody knows what to do' without instructions from the city council or planning office, although the green waves for cyclists on some streets surely facilitate it.

The collective poetic flow of cyclists through the city expresses the idea of a single cohesive cycling community, but it is clear from my empirical data that there

are many communities within cycling, and most cyclists belong to several of them. These smaller cycling communities are shaped through face-to-face interactions in densely meaningful everyday life contexts. It seems that they come together in a larger overarching community of Copenhagen cyclists through fleeting interactions that are largely free of social context (see Simmel, 1997; Berger and Luckman, 1966). Demerath and Levinger (2003) argue that pedestrians contribute to culture and community through their ability to experience, express, pause and collaborate. The same may be said of cycling. Interviewee participants talk about feeling like part of the city's organism, exchanging short remarks while waiting at the intersection, hopping off the bike to enjoy a pause outside a sundrenched café, and being part of a flow where everybody knows what to do. Similar to pedestrians – but unlike occupants of cars – cyclists share a relatively unmediated embodied co-presence on the streets (Spinney, 2009); the fact that this co-presence is freed from context (not from materialities, but from most social contexts) is perhaps what creates new types of mobile communities.

Robert Putnam (2000; 2012) notes that in 1990 the USA had more cars than people. He says this is a consequence and precondition of massive urban sprawl, indicating that people's primary activity in their hometowns is sleeping; work, leisure, and shopping occur elsewhere, with significant implications for the erosion of communities. A similar trend is evident in Denmark, although to a much smaller degree than in the US. Putnam's analysis of the relationship between mobility and community focuses usefully on the reconstitution of communities in the places people travel to and from, but it overlooks the possibility of community in spaces of mobility themselves. In Denmark, coworkers, friends and family members, and various sorts of on-line groups organise mobility spaces into communities of mobility. For example, Roskilde University students and employees who commute to campus from Copenhagen maintain a site on Facebook, through which they exchange knowledge about new bike equipment, and coordinate commuting partners for specific times and dates. One bike-lover's message to the Facebook site reads, "so sad about winter-cycling-hibernation: so on bike the 3rd of January. Returning around 4.30 pm. Anyone?" (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: Commuter's post to RUC Cycling Facebook Site.

Bauman might describe this Facebook site as an example of conviviality (Bauman in Thomsen, 2013) rather than community. It could be used to demonstrate Staeheli and Mitchell's (2006) argument that communities are false publics: spaces where sociability is claimed, but ordered and facilitated through security, familiarity, identity, control, and lacking in the randomness, chance, and confrontation with difference that characterizes a true public sphere. In this view, modern communities such as this are another articulation of individualization and separation. I think this is an incomplete understanding. It is true that Roskilde's cycling Facebook community is exclusive, for example in the way it relates to long distance commuters working or studying at Roskilde University. However, its users are quite dissimilar in many regards, ranging from speedy commuters in Lycra on racers, to slow movers on traditional bikes wearing everyday clothes. Moreover, Roskilde University does not have the same kind of websites for car or train commuters, which the majority of staff and students are. A strong cycling 'we' is created through this site, because it serves a minority mobility group at the university, enabling their face-to-face contacts and friendships, as well as nurturing a sense of belonging to a new movement (compare with Aldred's (2013) discussion of English cycling blogs, which are used primarily to complain about poor cycling infrastructure).

Attempts to theorise an individualization-community dichotomy have been prominent in post- or late-modern sociology and mobilities studies (see Beck, 2008; Elliott and Urry, 2010; Putnam, 2000; Bauman, 2001). On the one hand, mobile individuals are understood to experience freedom, autonomy and choice through mobility, and by using new (mobile) technologies and devices; on the other

hand, the technologies of mobility are described as requiring and enforcing discipline and control, which limits individuals' freedom. Either way, mobility's enthusiastically-described individualizing effects are understood to be destructive of community. Following Nancy (1991, 10), I am suspicious that this line of thinking expresses a "retrospective consciousness", which longs for an imagined *gemeinschaft*-like state of ontological security associated with pre-late-modern America, and overlooks the extent to which most families with kids, for example, continue to have strong bonds to local communities, regardless of trends toward greater mobility and individualization. As Nancy (1991, 11) says,

Society was not built on the ruins of a community. It emerged from the disappearance or the conservation of something – tribes or empires – perhaps just as unrelated to what we call 'community' as to what we call 'society'. So that community, far from being what society has crushed or lost, is what happens to us – question, waiting, event, imperative – in the wake of society.

I turn now to the example of the Bicycle Innovation Lab (BIL), to further explore the relationship between individualisation, cycling communities, and the common good. BIL is one of Copenhagen's alternative cycle associations, dedicated to politicising and building project identity around everyday cycling. One of BIL's major goals is to associate cycling with the common good in Copenhagen life and politics. The antagonism arising from Copenhagen's traffic policy is one of the lab's favoured points of engagement.

The Bicycle Innovation Lab (BIL)

The Bicycle Innovation Lab (BIL) was established in 2011 as Denmark's first centre for cycling culture. It was originally funded by the Danish Road Directorate's Bicycle Fund (Cykelpuljen), but now operates as an association funded by its members, which include municipalities, corporations and private citizens (see <http://www.bicycleinnovationlab.dk>). BIL operates a bike lending library and a knowledge centre at which cycling-related information is available, and through which discussions, video showings, lectures, exhibitions and other events relating to bicycles and bicycle traffic are coordinated. The information and programming it offers addresses big-picture issues (e.g., how municipal policy affects ridership), as well providing nuts-and-bolts advice (e.g., what kind of facilities workplaces should offer to encourage employees to cycle commute from longer distances). One of the goals of the architect who founded and directs BIL has been to highlight the trendy, fun and technologically innovative aspects of biking culture. As a result BIL offers somewhat different programming, and attracts a different audience, than Denmark's other main cycling association, the Danish Cyclist Federation. In this section I highlight several initiatives that exemplify BIL's approach.

In 2009, Copenhagen's cycling department produced a tourism brochure about Danish cycling culture. Its main message is that Denmark doesn't have

cyclists, but simply people who transport themselves by bike (Copenhagen Municipality, 2009). The main goal of BIL's lobbying, public events and exhibitions is to rearrange the right to road space in Copenhagen for the benefit of these ordinary city dwellers who travel by bike. One of the main discursive devices BIL uses to further this goal is a reverse traffic pyramid (see Figure 2), which arranges transportation modes on a continuum of social and environmental benefit to social and environmental detriment with walking at the top and jet transportation at the bottom.

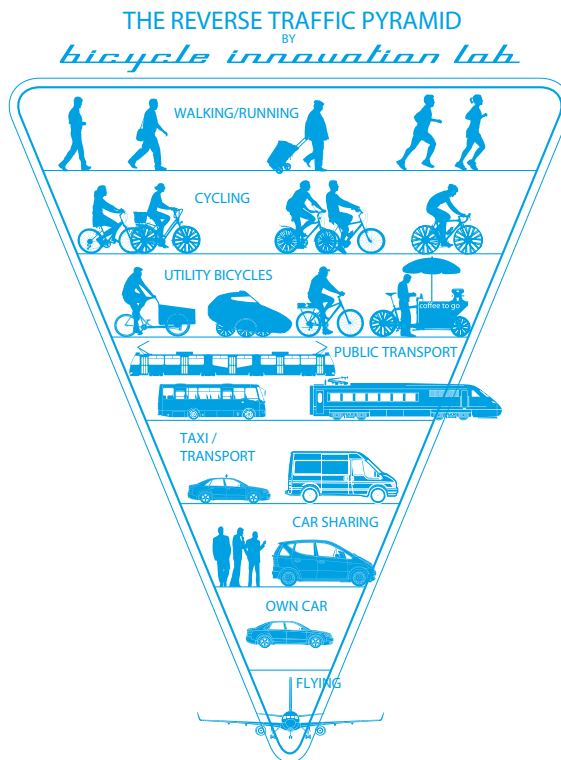


Figure 2: Bicycle Innovation Lab's Reverse Traffic Pyramid

Utility bikes are given their own category in the grouping of mobility modes illustrated on the reverse traffic pyramid, because according to BIL they serve specific needs that are most often served by cars, and therefore they constitute an important part of Copenhagen's anticipated future mobility system. As part of BIL's effort to promote the use of utility bikes, its traffic pyramid diagram expands the category beyond the standard (trendy) Christiania bike to include recumbent bikes and velomobiles, which have a nerdier image and thus appeal to a different constituency. BIL's emphasis on utility bikes of various descriptions exemplifies its efforts to nurture project identity (Castells, 1997): a context where new and expanded cycling cultures and institutions are constructed through users' own praxis. The reverse transport pyramid encourages people to perceive – and use –

the cycle as many different objects or technologies. Simply put, a bicycle is not ‘just’ a bicycle.

BIL’s reverse traffic pyramid may be understood as a diagrammatic representation of a perceived common good. To use Offe’s language, it articulates a “second future” emphasizing “the perspective of descendants”, with the intention to create “a valuable collective inheritance” (Offe, 2012, 677). Another way that BIL hopes to facilitate this conversion to a second future and avoid lock-in to the path dependencies of cars (Koglin, 2013; Essebo, 2013), is through its bicycle lending library (<http://www.bicycleinnovationlab.dk/bicycle-library>), which has a collection of rare and expensive bikes, folding bikes, electric bikes, old postal service bikes, cargo bikes, custom bikes and recumbent bikes. In the first years of BIL’s existence the bike library allowed anyone to walk in from the street and borrow a bicycle. Presently, due to funding constraints only BIL members can use the bikes; this reduces equity of accessibility, and undermines to some extent the library’s original intent. Still, the library allows BIL members to test bikes to see what works for them, allowing them to make better decisions about the sort of bike they should purchase to suit their needs (e.g., transporting kids, groceries or pets.)

The process of borrowing a bike involves completing a questionnaire and answering the question ‘what is a cycle?’ on a Post-It note (see Figure 3). These Post-It notes – which often include interesting and funny comments and illustrations – are displayed at a central location in the bike library, where they help articulate a cycling lifestyle and project identity for people entering the lab (Giddens, 1991; Eriksen, 2004). The content of this large assemblage of scribbles can be grouped into six main (overlapping) categories: movement, mobility, exercise, flexibility, happiness and freedom. Some comments are practical, defining cycling as “a way of transport” or “exercise and freedom in one”. Others are more poetic: “it’s sweat through underwear”; “a prolonging of your body”; “a bike is a love affair”. The latter statements emphasise the emotional attachment many people have to their cycles (see Spinney, 2009, for similar emotions expressed by car drivers).



Figure 3: Examples of Post-It notes drawn by BIL Bike Library borrowers

As another aspect of its efforts to nurture project identity and build perceptions of a common good around cycling, BIL emphasizes the futuristic and technologically trendy side of cycling and bicycles. For example, in December 2012 BIL collaborated with the IT department at University of Copenhagen to host a workshop for young people to think about the connection between bikes and technology, and to brainstorm new ideas for the future cycling city (<http://www.bicycleinnovationlab.dk/?l=uk&menu=jvv>). Participants discussed the “mobilization” of modern society (Beck, 2008; Kesselring, 2008), and its implications for social relations and ways of communicating, on and off the bike. They created a Facebook site for bikes (Facebike), as an example both of a virtual community bound together by a passion for cycling and a new way of identifying with movement technology that was formerly reserved for automobiles (Conley & McLaren, 2009; Sheller, 2004). Students brainstormed new visions of a cycling future, in the process confronting the challenge of preventing the mobile risk society from overwhelming and eroding the social, economic and ecological fundamentals of modern societies (Urry, 2011; Dennis & Urry, 2009; Kesselring, 2008). This was most evident in a tension they acknowledged between wanting to make bikes more technologically efficient and multifaceted, and what they perceived as the benefits of keeping it simple and basic so that the body remains the main mobility resource. Over the course of the two-day workshop students travelled to the outer limits of futuristic technology, but returned in the end to simple and easy solutions. Many of these focused on relations among cyclists, like the Facebike community, or bells that do not make people scared or aggressive in traffic. In contrast to Bauman’s (in Thomsen, 2013) assertion that solidarity is in big trouble, a prominent theme for the young workshop participants was supporting

solidarity among cyclists through the creation of ‘systems’ that mitigate the aggressions experienced on bike paths.

Finally, a major aspect of BIL’s mandate is to enfold a different constituency into Denmark’s cycling community than are affiliated with the more-established Danish Cyclist Federation. Specifically, BIL reaches out to those individuals – especially women – who wish to look chic and stylish, while also traveling by bike (see Danish cycling guru Michael Colville Anderson’s website ‘Cycle Chic’, <http://www.copenhagencyclechic.com>, which takes as its inspiration tourists’ fascination with Danish women cycling in chic clothing). Although BIL (and Colville Anderson) may be criticized for its somewhat sexist overemphasis on cultivating a fashionable cycling image (see, for example, <http://bikeyface.com/2012/02/03/so-ladies>), its efforts to promote utility bikes as a trendy mobility mode do attract an urban constituency that isn’t attracted by other cycling associations. This again is a tactic to forge project identity (Castells, 1997) through a range of everyday practices that allow people to enact their notion of the common good, while also being trendy on a cool bike and when they reach their destinations. Judging from my interviews with cyclists, it is a tactic that seems to be working, especially with younger people.

Cycling as a common Good?

Claus Offe describes the common good as “not reduced to fixed private preferences, but rather involving preferences that are presentable in the light of the public sphere. These are formed through their exposure to, and ability to withstand, the argued objections of opposing interests” (2012, 667). Offe goes on to say that democratic governments rely on citizens’ shared and practiced acceptance of some version of a common good:

...here a conjecture must suffice: that the agents of government policy are aware that they cannot manage with their own instruments – legislation, executive and judicial enforcement, and fiscal incentives – and thus depend on the norms and disciplinary effects of the citizens’ public spirit. (Offe, 2012, 669)

In keeping with Offe’s conjecture, the population of Denmark is accustomed to the notion of a common good; it is the moral foundation of the Danish welfare state, and the basis of many everyday practices such as sorting one’s trash, paying taxes, cooperating with police investigations, treating ethnic minorities with respect, and so on. Danish people’s taken-for-granted familiarity and comfort with common good arguments as a way to bridge the relationship between abstract societal considerations and everyday practical matters is evident in my interviews with cyclists. For many the common good seemed self-evident: “it is clearly for the common good if you improve bicycle transportation.” Others emphasized the contested nature of common goods: “if one imagines that different groups in society have some interests that may conflict, then a common good is a compromise that to some extent can benefit most people.” The latter quotation is

indicative of the majority of interview participants, who realized that almost any effort to establish a common good requires depriving some members of the polity of existing privileges (in this case, rights to city space), and therefore produces casualties, at least in the short term. This was especially troublesome for participants who have lived through the integration of automobiles into all aspects of everyday life, but who nevertheless imagined a future with fewer cars as serving the common good:

If we assume that it is hopeless with all the cars, because there are just more and more of them and they pollute and it is too expensive and in some way we must drastically change that. There would probably be a lot of people who think this was really shitty, but we simply have to do it because otherwise we end up in a situation we do not want. These kinds of decisions, I think we actually have to work towards, I think that is fair enough, because it is for our common good. How specifically to implement it has of course proved to be a very difficult issue.

As exemplified by the quotation above, participants feel that it is necessary to pursue a common good, and fair that some members of society relinquish privileges in order to achieve it. Nevertheless, although interviewees talked about reducing pollution, creating better conditions and designating more urban space for cycling, they also found it difficult to acknowledge overtly that more space for cyclists means less space for cars, and therefore drivers must abdicate some privileges in order to achieve the common good. In the cautious words of one participant, “if it is a common good, it must surely mean that the majority will benefit. That means there is also somebody who it is not going to benefit, and I do not know who that should be.”

Part of this reluctance to target automobility can be understood as the residual effect of earlier discourses that promoted car culture itself as a common good that would clean up the dirty and noisy city, and provide the opportunity for prosperity and healthy family lives (Drewes, 2008; Illeris, 2008; Rørbech, 2008). Denmark’s overwhelmingly tax-funded road infrastructure is a legacy of that earlier automobile-oriented common good discourse. Unlike the United States, for example, where over half of roadway expenses are covered by user fees (see Litman, 2012), Denmark’s roadways (with the exception of bridges) are paid for entirely through taxation, a fact which prompted some interview participants to understand roads themselves as a common good that should be more accessible to cyclists:

So I do think it is fair if the car drivers who have fairly high priority will have to pay in one way or another. It's a balance, not because we have to hit them in the head. But it could very well be that you have to give priority to other options, if necessary, if that's how it is.

My participants – all of whom were cyclists – clearly perceived cycling as a common good for Copenhagen and for Danish society as a whole, in environmental, health, safety, congestion and aesthetic terms. But they are all also

car drivers, and that also helps explain why they find it difficult to target automobility as a necessary victim of the common good. They occupy an ambivalent position in relation to a common good founded on cycling; they love their cars (and their bikes), but are also well-aware of driving's negative consequences for themselves and others (Freudendal-Pedersen, 2009). It seems that participants' ambiguous individual investments in multiple mobility modes impedes their ability clearly to conceive and work toward a common good founded more strongly on a particular mode of transportation (i.e., cycling). As Sayer (2011) states, social science can have a tendency to overlook or underestimate the ethical questions people confront and struggle to answer in their everyday lives (Freudendal-Pedersen, 2014a, 2014b).

Conclusion: Cycling communities and a common good

It is clear both at the Bicycle Innovation Lab (BIL) and to my interview participants that imposing limitations on the urban use of cars in order to benefit cycling is a difficult undertaking, even in Copenhagen where the municipality actively promotes cycling. This difficulty is hardly surprising, given a history of 60 plus years during which the hegemony of automobility has been aggressively pursued throughout the Western (and more recently non-Western) world (Urry, 2000, 2007, 2011; Featherstone, 2004; Horton, 2006; Aldred, 2012). In many European and North American cities cycling is practiced as a form of resistance to cars' dominance of urban space, a claim on the part of cyclists for the right to the city (Furness, 2007; Furness, 2010; Spinney, 2010). The popular Critical Mass movement exemplifies this approach to cycling as a mode of urban resistance (see Figure 4).



Figure 4: Glasgow Critical Mass advertisement

Cyclists in Copenhagen seldom adopt the attitude or politics of resistance that characterises cycling cultures in many other cities. In fact, BIL is the nearest

thing Copenhagen has to an organised effort in support of cyclists' right to city spaces, and its approach is polite and collaborative in keeping with the Danish equality mentality, which doesn't 'allow' for any outspoken inequalities (Freudendal-Pedersen, 2014c). Moreover, judging from my interview respondents, Copenhagen's cyclists have a clear sense that they *do* have the right to city space, in practice, in law, and as materialised in the built landscape. They would like this right – which they understand as a common good – to be expanded and more deeply embedded in praxis, but they have too fully taken up the discourse that Copenhagen is (already) the best cycling city in the world to advocate aggressively for placing restrictions on car traffic. This sense of pride in Copenhagen's singular status as *the* cycling city contributes to the strong sense of 'we' that nurtures the city's cycling community. At the same time, it is clear from the interviews that a sense of we also arises from the asymmetrically-structured antagonisms that arise between cyclists and motor traffic on an everyday basis in Copenhagen's overly congested transportation environment. The following interview quotation serves as an example:

I think the aggression and the conflicts occur because there is so little space. It's the same with cars. Sometimes I ride too close to the car and sometimes I touch the hood and they think I'm aggressive and will destroy something or assert myself. There is not enough space and it means that we ride too close.

It is possible to hear in this quotation echoes of one of Bauman's comments about the struggle for urban commons:

Urban territory becomes the battlefield of continuous space war, sometimes erupting into public spectacle of inner-city riots, ritual skirmishes with the police, the occasional forays of soccer crowds, but waged daily just beneath the surface of the public (publicized), official version of the routine urban order. (Bauman, 1998, 22)

In Copenhagen, the much-lauded delightfulness of the urban cycling context – even among less-than-satisfied cyclists themselves – serves to curtail the potential for eruptions, and keeps the “battlefield of continuous space war” beneath the surface, in the form of myriad small, individual aggressive encounters with arbitrary representatives of the dominant automobile culture. This form of quotidian cycling politics contributes to a project identity, which is supported by the municipality, and which helps to create a somewhat passive community of cyclists in Copenhagen. In this context it is difficult to nourish a critique of cyclists' constrained access to urban infrastructure, or to initiate politicized public discussions advocating for greater (or more protected) access as a public good. The Bicycle Innovation Lab is committed to creating that public discursive space, but in the absence of public funding most of its energy is dedicated to simply surviving, and it has been difficult to convince Copenhagen cyclists to support even as tame an association as BIL. It seems that the project identity enacted by Copenhagen's

cycling community hinders more than supports a productive public discussion about greater commitment to cycling as common good for the future city.

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